

The Streets of Surrender by onkei

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Summary: An anxiety-ridden Joyce is secretly relieved when Hopper visits to interrupt her evening that would have been just another numbing nightmare / Originally was going to be a one-shot but it's become a little more involved. Really want to explore some areas of grief and create an angst atmosphere for Jopper to flourish. / set post-season 2 / rating & genre, just in case.

The Streets of Surrender

Jonathon and Nancy pour out into the hall in a fit of giggles, leaving the bedroom door open behind them. Nancy's full, pink skirt flutters with her every step. She glances at Mrs. Byers, busy at the kitchen sink. Joyce looks over her shoulder at her son who's in love.

"Heading out?"

"Yeah, mom."

Jonathon meets her halfway across the kitchen for a peck on the cheek. Joyce takes them both in: so bright and happy and young. She feels the wave of nostalgia washing over her.

"Have fun tonight. Be safe."

"We will!" echoes back from the living-room. The elated couple have already made their way to the front door.

"CALL ME IF YOU NEED A RIDE!" Joyce shamelessly screams.

"DON'T WORRY!"

Joyce smiles softly to herself as she returns to her sink of warm, soapy water. She could practically feel Jonathon's eyes rolling as he went out the front door. She peeked out the window in front of her. Jonathon put his arm protectively behind Nancy on her lower back as they walked together to the car. The sun was setting sweetly now, casting a dreamy glow of red and orange behind the silhouette of the Sycamore in their front yard.

They will probably stay out tonight. I just hope they are making smart choices.

She washed mindlessly, watching the headlights pull back and away from the house, then the brake lights disappear with them on their next adventure.

Please, please. Be safe.

Joyce winced slightly as the memories of the previous year came trickling into her thoughts. She thought of Will - her poor baby who was the victim of an invasive possession to his body. *A monster took him.* Sometimes, she felt this sharp pang of guilt grip her heart. She could still see his eyes full of fear, the sweat thick on his clothes and the tears falling helplessly down his cheeks.

What kind of horror must that have been?

Her eyes started to burn as the view of the work in her hands became blurred with tears. She started when a knock came to the door.

Joyce sniffled as she peered out the window she was just gazing through, yet not seeing. She completely zoned out and now Chief Hopper's truck was parked where Nancy and Jonathon had just been. She blatantly tried to suffocate the flutter of butterflies that assaulted her stomach at the sight of the truck parked in her drive.

The fog rested eerily at the less-than-lively grass of her yard. The reds and oranges had started fading to pinks and purple in the sky. Joyce took her dish towel from the counter, dried her hands then flicked away any remnants of her private moment from her face. She wasn't about to hear it from Hop: *"Joyce, what's wrong? What happened?"*

Tossing the towel over her shoulder, she called out as she unlocked the door, "I'm coming, one sec."

The cold air didn't wait for an invitation to enter. The November chill took only a second to embrace her. Hopper stood before her, behind the screen door with a softer sense of urgency written on his face.

"Joyce, you alright?"

How could he know she was just on the brink of another panic attack?

"What," was all she could manage. She realized she stupidly was leaving him out in the cold but before she could think to let him inside, he was already taking a step towards her. She bit her lip behind his back as Hop shut the door behind him, took off his hat and turned to look at her.

His nose and cheeks had been kissed by the brisk air, she could see. She found herself lingering on his features more often. He wore his usual uniform, cloaked with the work of the day, and his scent that she had come to admire and know so well.

"Is anyone else here?" Hopper gestured with his hat slightly as he glanced towards the hallway.

"The kids are out. Jonathon and Will both-"

"Listen, has there been any weird calls lately?" he interrupted.

"Weird calls?" she blinked at him.

"Yeah, has anyone called the house within the past couple of hours?"

"No, not besides Karen asking for Will to come over and join the party..."

At that, Hopper seemed to relax a little. His shoulders dropped slightly, but it was clear he was still on edge.

"Hopper, what is going on?" Joyce was a little annoyed at the constant game of mystery now. That's how things went though. *Trust me now, I'll explain everything later.* His dramatic entrance had heightened her senses and raised her adrenaline.

To her relief, he changed his tone to nonchalant and more relaxed. He turned toward the kitchen, feeling somewhat at home, as always. He reached for his cigarettes in his front pocket as he spoke.

"Here's the deal: there's these punk kids harassing some of your neighbors. Got a couple calls into the station about it."

"Harassing, how exactly?"

"Calling the house and then loitering around, looking into the windows. Guy is wearing a mask. I'd imagine some junkie with Halloween gusto leftover."

Joyce reeled back in disbelief. Hopper raised his eyebrows at her, which she ignored as she went for her own cigarette pack left by the

sink.

"Oh my god, you scared me Hop!" The flick of the lighter and the satisfying first hit. She inhaled deeply as she looked out the same window above her forgotten chore. Deep purple enveloped the sky as the day was nearly done.

"I'm sorry?" she heard behind her. She turned to face him. Hopper looked at her like he was genuinely confused and slightly annoyed. Why did that work so well for them? They entered back into their cat-and-mouse, back-and-forth, play-fight routine that was becoming of them. The way he stood there, towering with that irritable tone and focused expression. *How did it suit him so well?*

"It's just some kid!" she raised her cigarette with her as her hands went up to show him, *it's nothing I can't handle*, in a shrug.

"Joyce," he retreated, "Trust me, I know you can handle yourself. I just wanted to check on you. I got my guys out there right now patrolling the area."

"Good, I'm glad we got that straight." Joyce went to the coffee pot to busy herself. *Calm down, breathe.* Maybe it was too much: the ever-present blanket of depression and anxiety she felt biting at her, relentlessly. Then, the intoxicating feeling bubbling up in her chest warmly at his mere presence. That's all it took, was Hop being in the same room. Then the unforgivable guilt that followed shortly after. Perhaps that guilt would be the demise of their potential romance. *It's my fault*, she was concluding.

Hopper felt dismissed but seemed relieved nonetheless. He took a drag off his cigarette when the phone rang.

Joyce looked at Hopper who was in between her and the landline, rotary phone mounted on the wall behind him. He tried to hide the slight curve of his smile and he stood and went to answer it. Joyce put up a fight, but her height and strength was no match. One hand pushing against his chest, another high above her as she reached up for the phone he held out of her reach.

"Byers' residence?" he gave her a playful look with his brilliant, blue

eyes. She glared at him with her deep, brown eyes.

She took a step back and hit her cigarette as she watched him. 'Who is it?' she mouthed at him.

Hopper who was once smiling with just his eyes at her subtly shifted gears into something more grave.

"Who is this?" Hopper said with a low tone.

Joyce's heart skipped a beat before it sped up.

"I said, 'who is this?!" Hopper demanded into the receiver. Joyce looked back out the window, to find her sunset had finally concluded. She reached out to grab Hopper by the arm, her other hand flying to cover her mouth as her blood ran cold at the sight.